



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE FUTURE OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

BY THE VENERABLE ARCHDEACON FARRAR.

---

I NEED hardly apologize for writing, as the editor of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* requests me to do, on the subject of the future of Westminster Abbey. Americans are at least as fully alive as Englishmen to the unique interest and preciousness of our national Walhalla. Almost the first thing that an American does, on visiting England, is to make his pilgrimage to the Abbey; but there are many Englishmen, even in London, who have never entered it. I was once baptizing the child of a nobleman in Henry the Seventh's Chapel, and one of the godfathers was another nobleman, who had just succeeded to a marquisate, and had been, for nearly fifty years, a member of the House of Commons. He had spent a great part of his life under the shadow of the Abbey, and was a man of ability and culture—yet he told me that, during that half century, he had scarcely once so much as entered the building, and knew nothing about it!

Down to the days of the Declaration of Independence the Abbey and its history is as much the inheritance of Americans as of Englishmen. Many of the graves and monuments in it—such as those of Earl Howe, and Sir Peter Warren, and Major André, and Sir J. Burgoyne, are almost more interesting to them than to Englishmen. It contains, in the window given by Mr. G. W. Childs to the memory of the two sacred poets, George Herbert and William Cowper, the *only* free gift, other than a bust or statue, that has been bestowed upon it in living memory. The bust of Longfellow, occupying so prominent a place in the south transept, is a beautiful sign that the two great nations, which are in truth but one nation, regard the literature of each as a common heritage; and though I have no right to speak in any name but my own, I, for one, should heartily rejoice, if it were possible

to have memorials also for such reformers as William Lloyd Garrison, such rulers as Washington, General Grant, and Abraham Lincoln, and such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne and James Russell Lowell. Twice within the last six years we have had funeral services to commemorate the deaths of two of those eminent Americans whom I have mentioned, General Grant and Mr. Lowell ; and I esteem it no small honor that, on both occasions, the privilege of delivering the funeral discourse was mine.

I have said that, "*if it were possible*," England would rejoice to place in her great and sacred mausoleum the monuments of the most famous Americans. But it is no longer possible, or can only be so, at the utmost, for a few years more. This fact renders it necessary to raise the question as to "*the future of Westminster Abbey*." The question has just occupied the attention of a Royal Commission, of which I shall speak further on.

The present state of things is this: If there be but one burial every year, the use of the Abbey as a place of *interment* for the illustrious dead might last for a century longer. But in that case any *monument* will be out of the question. The Abbey is already desperately overcrowded with tombs and cenotaphs. In the last century an enormous space was allotted to not a few whose reputations have proved to be only ephemeral, and to some who were, even in their own day, unknown to fame. At the present moment there is room for only two statues more ; and it is not difficult to name the two world-famous Englishmen—the great poet and the great statesman—for whom those two last places would be unanimously reserved. But even for the much humbler memorial of a bust, or a tablet, there is scarcely an inch of space. On November 2 the bust of Matthew Arnold was unveiled, and it is placed in the dark baptistery, where it is scarcely observed. I doubt whether the utmost ingenuity of the Dean and Chapter could find any space at all—even the most inappropriate and out of sight—for a dozen more busts of great men.

And already the want of space has led to unfortunate results. Mr. Gilbert's beautiful monument to Henry Fawcett in the baptistery is but half discernible in the darkness ; and the busts of Lords Lansdowne and Lord Russell have, of necessity, been thrust into obscure and unnoticed corners. The character of monumental records has thus been distinctly deteriorated.

"*To-morrow, victory or Westminster Abbey,*" said Nelson, on the eve of the battle of the Nile. But long before Nelson, in the days of the Commonwealth, Clarendon tells us that the body of the great Admiral Blake was brought all the way from Plymouth and, "with all solemnity possible, interred in Henry the Seventh's Chapel, among the monuments of the kings," because Cromwell wished "*to encourage his officers to venture their lives.*"

It would be idle to maintain that the prospect of such a posthumous honor is a matter of indifference to noble-hearted men. The Athenian felt that it was no small reward to a hero if they painted his portrait in the Pœcile; and though, as Pericles said, "of illustrious men, the whole earth is a tomb," yet illustrious men, and those who love and follow them, have felt that there is a strong incentive in the desire to earn the memorial of national gratitude. "*Well then, Westminster Abbey let it be!*" said the dying Grattan, not without satisfaction. A Roman writer esteemed it the highest honor if he could look forward to the day when his bust should have a place in the Palatine Library founded by Augustus. George Eliot knew that she could hardly, as yet, have a tablet in the Abbey, but she did not shrink from showing by a sigh her regret.

Every man and woman who rises but an inch or two above that dead level of mediocrity, "in which every molehill is a mountain and every thistle a forest tree," has much to endure in life from the stupidity, the calumnies, the envy, and the misrepresentations of contemporaries. Browning, in answer to one of those misguided persons who had sent him an abusive article on his books, with the simple question, "*Is this poetry?*" replied, that "he had too much experience that the human goose cackles when it is pleased, and hisses when it is malignant, ever to lift heel against what waddles behind it." But it is some consolation even to the greatest of the dead to hope that, when Death hath silenced "the chatter of irresponsible frivolity"—the sounds which, as someone has said, are the emptiest, and which therefore Echo loves—"those unknown voices which bellow in the shade, and swell the language of falsehood and of hate"—then the national gratitude of all who judge just judgment will accord them such recognition as they have honorably won.

Hitherto the memorials of the greater number of our most famous dead have been gathered in one great shrine for all men to

see. The dust of kings and rulers has mingled with the dust of men born in the humblest ranks of life and ennobled by genius alone. Poets, some of whom in life lacked bread, have here at least found a stone;\* and philanthropists, whose lives were endangered by the fury of banded interests and appetites, find that there is posthumous honor for those who have striven to undo the heavy burden and let the oppressed go free. Thus the Abbey furnishes a multitude of lessons. There is scarcely a single point at which it does not touch the great interests of English history. The kings of France, as Dean Stanley loved to point out, lie almost alone at St. Denis, and the popes of Rome at St. Peter's; the kings of Spain lie alone at the Escorial; the emperors of Austria at Vienna; the czars of Russia at Moscow and St. Petersburg; but at Westminster, the humblest, who were great by goodness, repose in death by the side of their sovereigns. Again there are churches like SS. Giovannie Paolo at Venice, and Santa Maria Novella at Florence, which contain the memorials of some of the famous dead. But there is no other building in the whole world where the visitor can trace the traditions, or study the records, or stand over the mortal remains of men who represent nearly all that is greatest in the national story of nearly nine centuries. Under one roof lie not only

"The painful warrior, famed for fight,"

but also the statesmen, the teachers, the divines, the orators, the musicians, the actors, the novelists, the explorers, the discoverers, the men of science, and the sweet singers—often sculptured as they stood in life with their garlands and singing robes about them. Of painters, we have only one—Sir Godfrey Kneller.

Crowded sources of interest make a visit to Westminster Abbey memorable to multitudes, of very different gifts. The student of Catholicism rightly recognizes in its minutest details a subtle and profound symbolism, intended to impress upon the soul the great doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement. The great architect sees in its exquisite proportions an epic poem in stone. For the man of poetic sensibility,

"Bubbles burst, and folly's raging foam  
Melts, if he cross the threshold."

\* On the tomb of Samuel Butler, author of "*Hudibras*," the elder Wesley wrote:  
"See him when starved to death and turned to dust  
Rewarded with a monumental bust;  
The poet's fate is here in semblance shown.  
He asked for bread, and he received—a stone!"

The sculptor sees in it the most extensive and wonderful of all schools of statuary, showing every phase of varying influence which affected the plastic arts from their beginning. The herald may study in it the rise, the decline, and the obliteration of the art of emblazonment. The student of religious development reads in the changing forms of the tombs the thoughts respecting life and death which prevailed in the ages of faith, of reform, of insincerity and compromise. The man of letters feels himself nearer to his most eminent predecessors as he recalls a hundred anecdotes which connect the story of their lives with this or that spot in the venerable building. The historian finds inspiration for great themes in its endless suggestiveness. To the archæologist it is a storehouse of authentic records illustrative of customs and costumes long obsolete. Even the man who is profoundly ignorant, and has no tincture of any science, must be less than human if he does not feel its awe-inspiring impressiveness. And yet nearly all these manifold interests are beside and subsidiary to the main purpose of the Church—as a place of great and solemn assemblages and functions ; as a place where, in the rendering of the masterpieces of sacred music, we may hear

“ the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced choir below,  
In music high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness through mine ear  
Dissolve me into ecstasies  
And bring all heaven before mine eyes ; ”

as a place, above all, where, day by day and year by year, through the long centuries, with sincere and loving devotion, though with very diverse opinions, men have listened to God's word, and uplifted their hearts in humble prayer.

The question, then, has arisen, in the minds of those who love their country, Whether this precious possession shall—so far as its most unique men are concerned—belong wholly to the past, and, by a sudden and grievous discontinuity, the memorials of the present and the future be severed from it ?—or whether it shall be so extended as still to concentrate within its sacred precincts the grandest associations of England's fame ? Can any man, other than some worldly cynic, give any but one answer ?

When Cyrus wanted to tame the pride of the great river Gyndes he diverted the current into a multitude of channels. Will

England gain if the memorials of her history are henceforth scattered in a multitude of different churches and cemeteries? If this would involve a national loss, can it be averted? This was practically the question which had to be considered by the "Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the present want of space for monuments in Westminster Abbey," of which the first report, presented to both houses of Parliament by command of the Queen, in 1890, lies before me.

The Commissioners were unfortunately only six in number. The result was an even vote for two different proposals. The Commissioners were the Right Honorable D. Plunket, Sir Henry Layard, Sir F. Leighton, Dean Bradley, Mr. Jennings, M. P., and Mr. Waterhouse, the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Much interesting evidence was elicited in their report. That some extension of, or addition to, the Abbey was needed, all were agreed. All were also agreed as to the desirability of pulling down the houses in Old Palace Yard. These houses are not only unsightly and obtrusive, but they threaten the Abbey with chances of destruction by fire. A much larger scheme of clearance was approved by the Embankment Commission in 1863. A clear view of the ancient buildings would thus be thrown open in the midst of a street, which, if the embankment were completed, would be the most magnificent in London, and perhaps in the world.

Many plans have been suggested, some of which I will mention: The scheme proposed in 1863 by Sir Gilbert Scott and approved (it is said) by the Prince Consort, was to sweep away a large number of houses and build a large cloister. To this scheme there would be the double objection of (1) enormous costliness, and (2) the remoteness of the new memorials from the Abbey Church, which, as it were, lends to them their consecration.

It has been suggested:

1. To utilize the immense Triforium, by removing thither some of the unsuitable and unsightly monuments. Access to the Triforium might be given by a spiral staircase. This plan would, at the best, be a makeshift. It has met with no favor. It would make of the Triforium, as Sir F. Leighton says, a *salon des refusés*.

2. To utilize the green strip of land which runs along St. Margaret's churchyard, by building a chapel and cloister.\* This

\* Suggested by Mr. Pearson, R. A.

is practically impossible. Public opinion would not permit the partial concealment of the present north side of the Abbey.

3. To utilize the site of the large ancient refectory of the monks, which runs along the side of the south cloister, and is now included in the garden of Ashburnham House. The house and garden had been, from time immemorial, in the possession of the Abbey, but were taken from it in 1881, in accordance with a clause introduced into an Act of Parliament with very little discussion in 1868. I shall always think that this was a high-handed and unwarranted procedure ; but the mischief is done, and as there is very little chance that it will now be undone, this scheme of rebuilding the old refectory as a mortuary chapel is not likely to be carried out.

4. To utilize the existing cloisters and the garth which they surround. But the garth already contains the mortal relics of generations of Benedictine monks ; the cloister walls are so crowded with monuments, that, unless these were removed,—which would be hardly fair,—only a few irregular spaces are left ; and under the cloister stones, during six centuries, no fewer than 1,757 persons, at least, have been interred. Apart from the fact that the cloisters are already thronged with memorials, this suggestion was almost universally condemned as inadequate.

5. To build “a wreath of chapels” between the buttresses of the Chapter-House. Such chapels, however, would be comparatively insignificant in themselves, and the public sentiment would never be brought to connect them with the great shrine. Nor would they admit of the solemn and stately services at the burial of great men which are now felt to be intensely impressive.

6. The sixth plan, with various minor modifications, is to build out from the Abbey a splendid memorial chapel, facing the Houses of Parliament, and connected with the Abbey itself by a wide cloister under the buttresses of the Chapter House. This plan was approved by the eminent architect, Mr. Fergusson ; and is also approved by the present distinguished architect of the Abbey, Mr. J. L. Pearson. It is identified with the name of the Right Hon. Shaw Lefevre, who, not only as First Commissioner of Works in 1880–1884, but ever since, has shown an enlightened and patriotic interest in this great question. The plan could have been accomplished in the year of the Queen’s Jubilee, and would have provided for the English-speaking race, not only a



splendid monument of the long reign of Queen Victoria, but also a resource which would have lasted for centuries. First and last, indeed, involving, as it does, the purchase of sites and the demolition of houses, it would have cost at least £150,000. During the rejoicings of the Jubilee year this sum could have been raised by subscription with the aid of a government grant. It has the Queen's approval and sympathy, but Her Majesty "did not wish it to interfere with the scheme for the erection of an Imperial Institute, to which her consent had already been given as the principal monument of her Jubilee." Nothing, therefore, has yet been attempted in this direction,—but in spite of the dissent of three of the Commissioners, it may safely be prognosticated that this scheme alone will be regarded as possible, desirable, and adequate.

It remains to be seen whether the enthusiasm for England and her history is sufficient to stimulate the requisite energy and munificence. If not, if the memorials of the dead are henceforth scattered in various churches, and Westminster Abbey, so long the pride and glory of England, loses its splendid continuity of associations—I cannot but think that the omen will be disastrous. When, in the great church of San Paolo Fuori le Mura, at Rome, it was found that, after Pio Nono, there would be no room for the likeness of another Pope, the incident was thought to foreshadow an eclipse of Papal power. It would be not only an omen but a disaster, if, for lack of generosity, of public spirit, or of sense of our national duty to the past and the future, Westminster Abbey should cease to maintain its ancient influence. It would prove that we were degenerate sons of the fathers who have not only bequeathed to us the example of so many noble deeds, but who also enshrined the memory of those who wrought them in a church meant to be like the temple of Solomon, "exceeding magnificent, of fame, and of glory throughout all countries."

May the influence and public opinion of America help to convince England of the necessity for taking early steps to build, in closest connection with the Abbey, some grand memorial chapel which shall enable generations yet unborn to pay worthy honor to the famous dead, alike of the old home and of the Western world !

F. W. FARRAR.